

Town wants to show off 'jewel' at Equestrian Park

By Bill Rea

The Caledon Equestrian Park is a place to show off, and that's just what was going on recently.

The park was the location of the Mayor's Harvest Business Lunch, hosted by Mayor Allan Thompson.

The park was the site of show jumping and dressage events earlier this year at the Pan American Games, and that was the result of a lot of work over several years.

Caledon's CAO Doug Barnes commented the efforts started around 2009, when the Town decided to make submissions to host some of the events at the Games, using funds from the Federal and Provincial governments.

'We had quite a journey over the last six years to get here,' Barnes remarked.

He added



Equestrian Management Group partner Bob Carey, Town CAO Doug Barnes, Mayor Allan Thompson and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority CEO Brian Denney spoke at the recent Mayor's Harvest Business Lunch at Caledon Equestrian Park.

ed that in the end, it proved to be a good business deal for the Town, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and Equestrian Management Group (EMG), but it took a lot of coordination to bring about the necessary public-private partnership to do it. There were a number of contracts that had to be worked out, but Barnes pointed out most of them were awarded to Caledon firms. 'I think that was a real plus,' he declared.

Hosting the games brought jobs and business to Caledon, and there were some bonuses too. Barnes pointed out the landscaping at the front gate of the park was donated. He also observed that Bell Canada ran fibre lines up Regional Road 50 to facilitate communications during the Games, and that's been helpful in bringing high-speed internet to the area.

Barnes added a survey was conducted during the Games, and 89 per cent of the people who came from out of the area to attend the events indicated they would come back to Caledon.

Thompson observed the park consists of 95 acres.

'It's now a crown jewel,' he remarked.

He added hosting the Games was a crowning moment, bringing the Town a class facility. Thompson pointed out the indoor show jumping ring is bigger than the one at Ricoh Coliseum, where the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair events will take place later this year.

Thompson observed there will be plenty of opportunities to make use of the facility, truck shows, livestock shows, car shows, 4-H events, etc.

'We have a huge opportunity,' he declared.

He also pointed out there's a community room on the site that can accommodate some 150 people and has Wi-Fi, as well as a full-service kitchen.

'It's fully accessible and it has all the amenities,' he said.

It will be available for community groups, and Thompson said the Rotary Club of Palgrave will be using it.

Thompson also stressed the importance of public-private partnerships, pointing out they come together and make things go forward.

'We're here to streamline processes,' Thompson said, adding if things work better, businesses will profit and they will be willing to keep investing in the area. The park is one example of that, and he also cited the Exchange in Bolton as another.

Others were impressed with the results, such as Brian Denney, CEO of TRCA, which owns the facility.

"We're just thrilled with the outcome," he remarked, stressing the TRCA Board was very supportive of bringing in this benefit to Caledon and the Greater Toronto Area. "We couldn't be more proud of the outcome."

"It's all been a great experience," he added.

Bob Carey, a partner in EMG, pointed out equestrian events at the site are nothing new. They've been taking place there since the 1970s. Prior to the Pan Am Games, he said there have been many major events, like World Cups, Selection Trials, etc. He added a lot of riders have trained at the site, so the prospect of hosting the Games in July was very exciting.

"What better site could there be?" he asked.

Carey added they found plenty of enthusiasm when they approached the Town and TRCA about hosting the Games, and those discussions led to the partnership.

"It was a very rewarding experience for us," he added.